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Interviewer: Chloe Brown
Interviewee: Lena Ziegler
Date: March 22nd 2017
Topic: Women's March

Lena Ziegler Interview

CB: This is Chloe Brown interviewing Lena Ziegler and it's March 22 and we are still at Starbucks. Alright, tell me a little bit about yourself, just in general.

LZ: Okay. Well I'm going to answer the questions that I just heard you ask before. I am 28. I'm from Pennsylvania, originally from Northeast Pennsylvania; which the reason I point that out is because Pennsylvania is sort of known for having two very liberal ends (Philly and Pittsburg) and everything else is very rural, very conservative. So it's usually a blue state but it's not really where I'm from. But I grew up there my whole life. I moved to Tennessee when I was 25. I did a year of AmeriCorps Vista where I was running a food pantry there and then I came to Kentucky for my MFA and I'm going to be going to Ohio for my PhD in Rec Comp. So that's all I'm going to give. I don't know if there's anything else specific but those are the relevant things, I think.

CB: What about your undergrad?

LZ: It was English professional writing; that was my degree. And I went to Kutztown University which is in Pennsylvania.

CB: Okay! So you also went to the Nashville march?

LZ: Yes!

CB: Alright. So I guess just kind of tell me about that day. So what all happened, what did you do? How was it?

LZ: Okay! I will say it was a very positive experience. I- prior to the march, prior to the Nashville march, prior to all of it happening- I had been very distraught over the election, as all- as so many of us were. And immediately after the election, I remember people talking about this march happening. And I had initially been so committed to the idea of going to D.C. and then logistics kind of got in the way and I started to feel like "it's not fair that all the ____ 1:59? ____ people who can afford to take the time can go", ya know? And quickly though these things were like popping up everywhere. And it was exciting because we knew that, as a group, there was enough of us in our core group that were committed to this, to go. So going to Nashville was very exciting for that reason. The night before I will say, I was sad I wasn't going to D.C. because I saw on social media all these pictures of planes and people very excited about the D.C. march. And I was feeling sort of "oh I want to be at the big one!" but then the day of, when we were driving there and well, the night before when we made our posters, the day of when we were driving there. I was really excited. I was excited because it felt like a chance to actually respond in a place. I felt like my voice didn't actually matter initially. It didn't matter how many

had voted, it didn't matter how strongly I felt, it didn't matter how obvious the choice seemed to me. Everything that I had said and done, the whole fall, didn't matter. It was the only way to really respond in a way that felt productive, and felt better than just ranting and feeling bad about things. So I went with this feeling of hopefulness and when I got there, that's 100% what I felt there. Initially before everything started, I was just walking up to the park and seeing massive crowds of people and seeing all these women friends together and all this excitement about being a woman and feeling empowered to do something and feeling powerful because you're a group is kind of embracing something that – womanhood had been really under attack from this past election—it was just really, really inspiring. And very, just, I just felt very filled with hope from being there and just looking around and seeing families- that was a big thing, seeing families and their kids, seeing little children, -- I'm going to cry. Seeing like little kids, feeling like “oh there's a future beyond this election. There's a future beyond these four years and these are the people that's going to make that future happen.” And it felt really good in that way. So I will say that the entire experience was very positive, being surrounded by literally thousands and thousands of people that were on your side after feeling so isolated for awhile was just extremely refreshing.

CB: Yeah. Were there any driving- was there a driving purpose for you to go to the march? Were you marching for any specific reasons or just..

LZ: Oh god. I think there's a lot of reasons for me. I've always cared about rights and needs and feelings of marginalized people. But what I want to say about the march as a whole is that it's really hard for people of privilege, and I'm including myself when I'm saying that, to, I think, to feel motivated to step outside of that. I think unless you're forcing yourself to see something, you're blind in a way. And so I feel what had happened in this election, I know a lot of people criticized the fact that it was only like when only a woman was being offended did that, by Donald Trump, start being really bothered. Ya know, it didn't matter that he offended disabled people or black people or Hispanic people, it was when it was a white woman that people started to freak out. And I know that was critiqued a lot which was a completely valid critic. But I think it doesn't really matter what gets people to take action, it just matters if they take action. And so how I felt as much as I've always been there as a person that's cared for other people and I have taken action in my own ways in different times, it felt so personal. This election felt so personal as a woman. And I almost felt like how could, as a woman, how could I accept that the man in office could completely abuse the woman he was running against and completely abuse and has abused and continues to abuse women of every sect of every part of his life so openly and has the support of people- it basically felt like the biggest attack on being female that I have ever witnessed in my life. And it was coming all at once represented by Hillary being defeated, if you want to put it that way, and/or just being deeply mistreated caring over to the actual things that Donald Trump is doing or saying, the ways his supporters were reacting to that. It was just like being a female was the worst thing and for the first time in my life I felt my actual lack of privilege in a really severe way. And I think that's what made the march happen. I don't think it's because it was the worse flaw of Donald Trump's campaign but I think it was the first time it forced privileged women, in many cases, to look at themselves and recognize that they are apart of that marginalized population, ya know? So I would say that the biggest thing, to answer your question—I'm sorry, I'm thinking through a lot of it. I'm thinking that the biggest things is really that as a woman I felt like there was literally no option to sit back because I cannot live in a

world in which I don't at least try to speak up when I'm basically apart of a group of people that is being completely disrespected in the worst possible ways to me. Did that make sense?

CB: Yeah so inaction was unacceptable.

LZ: Yeah, exactly. It became—it felt like inaction was acceptance, ya know? And I still feel that way and that was not because only with the women's march. The women's march gave everyone a focal point to say, "Ya know what, this was our first action, this is our first resolve from the election. We are going to focus on this day." But it's not—I think there's a lot of people who maybe haven't continued action after that but I think there are a lot of people that have. There's more action then I've ever seen in my life in ever from people, in terms of their political action right now. And I think that this was a great jumping off point because the mind of everyone—you're not alone, you're not in the minority for feeling this way, other smart, intelligent, vibrant, wonderful people agree with you. And it was empowering to start the year that way, to start this presidency that way, and feel like you're apart of the opposition from the very beginning and that's a good thing. So, yeah, inaction wasn't an option and this kind of made that impossible to go backwards.

CB: Did the—did Trump winning the election change the way you look at the United States and its population?

LZ: Yes and I hate that. But, yeah, it did. I think it did because it changed the way I looked at a lot of people I knew. Because I recognize that's there's this really deep seated complacency. There's also a lot of really un—what had to be this unearthed rage that I didn't really know had been there. The threat to safety now feels bigger to me now than I ever known it was. So, yeah, it kind of revealed the ugliest underbelly of America to me and I'm happy I know it's there now. I'm glad it's cooled off. I'm accepting that this is kind of a new world that we're living in but it feels like a new world versus like Nov—I mean it's troubling to me that he's doing so well in the election, the entire campaign, that was very troubling and it made me question things but I kept thinking there's this demographic, it's not everybody, but then this happened and it's enough people that this happened. And that was very frightening to me. So, yeah, it really made me reevaluate, it really made me reevaluate a lot of family members and things and wondering why the things he had said and done that were so cruel and offensive about so many people and the policies he was proposing and is now following through with, why they were acceptable. And it made me wonder how much progress we actually made and how much we've just been told we've made.

CB: So after the women's march what types of, you said you would be more engaged in the future, right? Have you participated in any other marches or calls or have you contacted your senators or anything like that?

LZ: Yeah! Actually, yes. So shortly after the Women's March there was a march, I think it was only a week later, also in Nashville that a lot of us attended as well, that was about the Muslim and refugee ban that had been put on. And that was actually, even though the Women's March I loved and adored, that was actually more powerful for me because it wasn't—I was fun because it felt like doing something important but it wasn't fun. Things got real. Things were no longer

the excitement of pink pussy hats and stuff, it was like, “we are getting together because we don’t have a choice now.” This isn’t a symbol, I guess the point, this isn’t symbolic. This is real policy that we have to, that we have to stop. So the stakes were totally different. Within a week, I mean, within a few days the stakes had totally changed. So, yeah, that was one of the first things, that got me very passionate. And when I was there, there was a lot of speakers, people from different local organizations, you could sign up for all these different text message alerts, so I’m on like four different text alerts so like every day I get texts from different actions you can take and actually it’s helped me keep up when it comes to writing senators or writing to representatives. When the whole Betsy Devos nomination was happening, that I was very passionate about—I have a whole family in education, every person, my parents, everyone is a teacher and I also plan to teach. And so it was something that I was very moved and very concerned. I attended a protest here in Bowling Green also for that, as well. I was very committed to that cause and it was – I took some time off after that because it didn’t work out. It didn’t go the way I was hoping it would go. So it was really discouraging. And since then, I’ve been a lot less active but I’ve recently determined as the ACA vote is coming out tomorrow there’s no time to be inactive, it’s a privilege to be inactive and I don’t want to do that. So I’m trying to kind of make myself get back into the passionate place I had been in earlier.

CB: So did you—you made signs too.

LZ: Yeah! So my signs had two different sides as well. The first side which was Which Side Are You On which was a famous folk song from the 1960s. I think it was actually 1950s but, regardless, and the reason I picked that song, specifically, well first of all I loved the—I’m very impassioned about folk music, the protest music of the 50s and 60s and early 70s and so I—but I also feel this is the most urgent time in our country since then and so calling back to that was ac—like something I wanted to do. But with that song in particular Which Side Are You On, it’s this song that is forcing you to question your complacency with things and forcing you to really ask yourself which side of history do you want to be on. And being at that, being at the rally was like, like I needed to make people think about that, question that, ya know? The other one I had was also Surround Hate and Force It To Surrender. Which is also a folk related quote from **Heat Seekers Guitar** which he had on his guitar. And the whole concept of it is there’s love and compassion and faith and humanity can overcome humanity, ya know? And I love that. So those were to me, making you ask a question but also kind of giving hope and I like it for those two reasons. Like they were really important messages to have.

CB: Do you see any parallels between—I mean you’re talking about the protests and the folk movement—do you see any parallels between what they were protesting and writing about and what’s going on now?

LZ: Oh absolutely, yeah! Yeah, absolutely. I think there’s a fairly clear comparison with the civil rights movement, especially with what, I think, LGBT populations right now are really experiencing. I would say especially trans populations, but everyone really. But also, very much within the movement in Hispanic populations, I feel like their being especially targeted right now and I see—I’m incredibly fearful of this extreme “othering” that we’re having right now. Where people are—yes, I see a comparison in terms of civil rights, in terms of respect given, just generally, to marginalized groups, yeah a very strong comparison there. Also I will say a big part

of the 1960s protest was Vietnam and a lot of that was the drafting, the autonomy of peoples being forced into and I almost and I don't want to compare what's going on right now with that it's just that I almost feel that by entering into this new administration where military and the wall trump ever- literally Trump everything (I didn't even mean to do that). It's sort of throwing me back to this idea the government is deciding what has to matter with our bodies, has to matter what we do with our bodies, how- where the focus of our money is going, and it's still on this sort of military action and presence and stuff. It's sort of like- I see some comparisons there, as well, in terms of the government, I think, mismanaging the ____? ____ of its people. Ya know?

CB: Yeah. What about the Women's March and other civil rights marches?

LZ: I feel like the Women's March, I mean, honestly, had less direction than the civil rights marches in the past because it was a generic women's march it wasn't—there were so many different ideas being represented which I think is really important and wonderful. But it was more, I still feel the Women's March was more of a symbol than it was for a specific cause and I think the symbol was important and really big and valid role especially because there was so much amazing global support of it. It really—I'm getting chills talking about it. It's meaningful to people to remember that day. However, there really wasn't legislation being fought yet, there was just this idea of being attacked. Where a civil rights marches in the past were—I mean it was almost life or death, in a lot of cases. The stakes were already that high, during the Women's March, the stakes were just what we thought would become that high. They have but at the time it was a symbol, do you know what I mean? So I would say that it was really important and it will go down in history, especially seeing how the next four years go. I think it will always be a memorable thing. I think it will be in text books. I think it will be noted that people were protesting about something that mattered but it's not going to be as clear cut as—the March on Washington, ya know? Martin Luther King, I think that has a more clear message, if that makes sense.

CB: Yeah. In terms of criticisms of the March, so you're talking about how there wasn't a specific driving message, what about the criticisms in terms of inclusion?

LZ: I actually think that, yeah, those are very valid and I'm going to be honest about it, it was one of the things that I didn't think about until I saw people talking about it on social media. And that is largely to just being a white woman. For the first time in my life, really having my personal rights feeling very directly challenged. I think that's where a lot of that comes from is people who have been fighting for years sort of got wiped over with this whole Woman's March. It's not completely fair. It's not completely accurate of the situation. I don't think it was ever intended in any way to not be inclusive. I think it was almost like inexperience and almost applying this fun attitude to, which wasn't bad but it's different. It's a different tone. I think that LGBT, people who are LGBT, and allies, ya know they have been fighting for very specific rights for a very long time and they have been marginalized in a very deep, specific way as African American people—like the Black Lives Matter, for example—very specific, very life and death situations stuff. And the Women's March almost like put a pretty pink hat on it, literally. I don't think there is anything wrong with that but I think it is a valid criticism to say that, "Alright we have a bunch of white women protesting, so it's going to be a fun time and we are going to have silly fun signs and we are going to be celebrating the fun of being in a protest."

Where as other people are like, “No, we’ve been doing this cause our lives literally depend on it.” So I understand it. I think they are valid criticisms.

CB: How do you feel about the pussy hats?

LZ: Yeah know I don’t have a problem with them because I feel like it made—here’s the thing, I completely understand and again, I didn’t think about it until it was pointed out to me online so I’m just going to be honest about that. I completely understand the argument that it was not inclusive for trans women and I think that’s awful and it sucks and it was unintentional but a clear oversight that shouldn’t have happened. However, female sex bodies are also being legislated right now, ya know? Actual female genitalia is being controlled or ideally trying to be controlled. I mean there was—trump was literally signing away rights basically for women around the world to be able to get abortions with cutted funding. So I think actual female biology is being attacked in a lot of ways as well as the female gender. So I think representing pride female biology is also important as well as female gender. Does that make sense? And I think it’s not meant to be—I don’t think it was intended that way. Even though I understand why it’s problematic that it came off and it ultimately hurt people and I.. That sucks, so.

CB: You spoke about the march as a symbol. Do you think that communicating—do you think that the march was most effective because it communicated this message? Or do you think it was more effective because it mobilized a group of people?

LZ: I think because it mobilized a group of people, ultimately. I mean what I liked about the march was that it showed, despite all the criticisms, it showed a lot of togetherness. I think that was really important for a lot of people to feel togetherness. But ultimately how we feel doesn’t really matter. What matters is what we do and the actions we take. And I think that probably—I mean this is, I don’t know, but probably 50% of the people never did anything again after that march. And that might be me being generous, by saying that. But if that means 50% or 30% or 20% more people started writing to their senators and congressmen because of it, who cares? Those actions matter so much and the symbol is beautiful and inspiring but, ultimately—I’m going to quote a folk song! “Marches alone can’t bring in ____? ____.” They can’t, they can’t do everything. You have to take action. You have to show up all the time, not just when it’s broadcast all around the world. And I think it inspired a lot of people to do that.

CB: Okay. How has it maybe changed the way you see yourself as a political entity?

LZ: It made me feel like—what’s funny is like when you’re with a group of thousands and thousands of people, you would think you would kind of feel like you’re lost in a crowd but in the case of being there, you felt like you were really building something. Because like every single person there added to the size of that crowd and added to the size of the movement. So it made me feel like it’s important to show up. It’s important to be a body there supporting something. So I guess what it really reminded me of is that when people are taking time after work and struggling to take care of their kids but still plan a protest then you should show up and you should be there and support and you should show up to show visually that there is a support there because that impacts how people see it. That’s how people view things when they see a lot of support so being a body in support, that’s what made me really feel that. I kept looking around

and thinking all these people are here and all these people made it work and globally people made it work. And that made me realize that involvement is necessary. It's like a privilege to not be involved and I still experience that privilege a lot where I can step back but it kind of forced me to recognize that I do have some power. And because of my privilege, I do have power to show up at protests and not be that afraid of the police. I have that power that some people don't have. And it's not fair that I do but because I do, my presence mattered. Just like everybody else's does but my presence is invaluable in those situations.

CB: In terms of the police, did you feel—was there a police presence at the march and did you feel safe at the march?

LZ: I felt very safe at the march. Honestly, very safe. I was—a couple of times I got nervous but mostly because I was thinking about my—the stereotypes I had of Trump supporters. It wasn't so much because of the largeness of the crowd; the crowd was extremely loving and that's the feeling that I really had. There was a lot of love and compassion and excitement and happiness. I felt very comfortable being in a crowd of 20,000 people. There was no part of me that was worried about it. I don't—I know there was a place there where they were just walking around the border. It did not feel in any way threatening which is nice for us. It's very nice to have police there that aren't really concerned. And it just didn't come off- I just barely noticed them, if that tells you anything.

CB: You mentioned your family earlier, how did your more immediate family—did you talk to them about going to the march and how did they respond? What was that conversation like?

LZ: Well my family is extremely liberal. So it was a very positive conversation. I mean a lot of my family members, actually, on one side of my family, seven family members went to the march in Washington. A few went to nearby, like small marches. But most of them stayed at home and were just very excited to live vicariously through my experience. And they were very supportive and very happy because they were all equally distraught about the election and continue to be. So I think they were just very excited and I think a lot of them regretted not being apart of it themselves afterward.

CB: Okay, a couple more and I'm done.

LZ: Sure!

CB: In terms of this feeling of community, it seems like the creative writing department has a very strong community.

LZ: Yeah.

CB: So how is that significant in terms of dealing with the election and going to protests and stuff.

LZ: I think it is very significant. I think one of the powerful things about going to a protest is that feeling that you're not alone. But in between the protests, you need to feel like you're not alone

or else it gets overwhelming. So being in a close-knit community with people that are like minded and value the same things has been instrumental in feeling like I can do this. And also, there have been quite a few times that I haven't really wanted to do something but someone, one of my friends, is, "Oh no we've got to." And I was like, "Oh okay." Or I've been that person for them also. So it helps motivate each other to remember like, "Hey take a minute out of your busy day and do this thing that takes 30 seconds by writing your senator." And so having the community is really important to keep up with each other and also to remind each other to that this isn't going away. Having people that care and are actively engaged, like talk to, not just talk to about other things, you actually care about these things means you can't really forget they're happening and that's, I think, valuable

CB: Alright, so, if you were going to just sum up your march experience and in a couple sentences, how would you describe the main take-aways?

LZ: I would say the main take-away would probably be motivation and feeling like this is a problem that can be overcome. And this isn't America. This is just what's happening right now. And that was the thing that was really inspiring for me. I mean, but, the entire global event that happened is that this isn't about America, hopefully. It's not about America falling into a fascist state. It's about a really dark time that will be overcome by all of the people that are collectively against it. So it made me feel motivated to continue being apart of that group. It made me feel hopeful. It made me recognize the wonderful diversity again of this country. And stop being angry at people because there is a lot of people that didn't want this and there is a lot of people that did not vote this way. And it's sort of unfair to get down on the whole country that I do think we have a really awesome country in a lot of ways, despite the challenges. We all have a cool place that we all live. It made me kind of be excited about that again because I looked around and I see all these people that are so diverse and so different and we're all coming together and that's a beautiful thing. Especially, in just a divisive time. So motivation and inspiration probably.

CB: One more, I'm sorry.

LZ: No, it's okay!

CB: Has—did—has the election and the subsequent resistance made you think differently about what you want to do in the future or how you want to do it in the future?

LZ: That's actually very interesting. So I've always been very interested in marginalized groups and I'm very interested in social justice issues in general. It's always been a strong, interesting passion of mine. So in the fall I started teaching for the first time. I knew before the election that I was probably going to want to teach but it wasn't until I taught that I was a kind of ____? _____. But I taught with a theme of poverty, privilege, politics and teaching that in a red state during this election was very challenging but extremely rewarding. I saw how openness and people allowing, being allowed to have diverse opinions and express themselves and ask questions changed a lot of people's views. And I'm not about making people liberal; that's not what it is. It's about making people comfortable enough to ask questions about things they have been told their whole life. So it made me feel so attached to the idea of teaching and once the election

happened, it made me feel so much more attached to the idea of teaching about social justice throughout the lens of writing and communication so that people can understand what's going on around them and interpreting the media and interpreting the rhetoric that they're told and interpret otherness and all of that. It made me inspired to continue the path that I was sort of developing and then because of that I decided to go through and apply for the PhD program and go for that and now that is what I'm doing. So it did, actually, marginally influence me to continue pushing in that direction and really come full circle; so that I feel like, longterm, it really did make a difference in how people conduct themselves and their ideas about this crazy world we're living in. Yeah.

CB: Alright is there anything that I did not ask that you think is important to say?

LZ: Not really. I feel like you really covered a lot of different—you were mostly looking into to get a varied view of point of the experience of the march itself, right?

CB: Just your general perception.

LZ: Yeah I think you asked a lot of really varied questions so, yeah I think you're good but I don't have anything else to add really.

CB: Alright. Thank you!

LZ: Yeah!